

HOUSE BILL 2537

By Pitts

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 15, to establish "Wilma Rudolph Day" in Tennessee.

WHEREAS, Wilma Glodean Rudolph of Clarksville, Tennessee, was born on June 23, 1940, the twentieth of twenty-two children, and was stricken with scarlet fever and polio at a very young age, humble beginnings for a woman who was destined in her lifetime to achieve worldwide renown; and

WHEREAS, although she wore a brace on her left leg due to polio until she was eleven years old, young Wilma would dazzle the world with her foot speed a mere five years later at the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia, as she claimed a bronze medal; and

WHEREAS, proudly representing the United States of America again at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, Wilma Rudolph became the first woman in the history of the Olympics to win three gold medals in one competition, thus becoming an international hero; and

WHEREAS, returning to her hometown as an Olympic Champion, Wilma Rudolph achieved her most important victory – refusing to attend her own celebration if it was to be segregated. On October 5, 1960, over 3,000 people turned out to watch the hour-long parade and 1,100 packed into the Clarksville Armory for a banquet in her honor, the first desegregated social event in the city's history; and

WHEREAS, a champion in her every endeavor, Wilma Rudolph was a popular lecturer, author, national spokesperson, successful business executive and a United States Goodwill Ambassador during her lifetime, as she sought to make contributions in service of her fellow man and the youth of America; and

WHEREAS, it is highly appropriate that we pay respectful tribute to the memory of such a truly remarkable athlete, distinguished humanitarian, and exemplary human being by establishing a day of special observance in her honor; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 15, Chapter 2, is amended by adding the following language as a new § 15-2-114:

§ 15-2-114

June 23 of each year shall be observed as “Wilma Rudolph Day,” to be proclaimed as such by the governor, to honor and recognize the late Wilma Rudolph for her inspirational example in overcoming childhood disability to excel as an athlete, her numerous athletic accomplishments, including winning three gold medals at the 1960 Olympics, her courage in combating segregation, and her humanitarian work as a United States Goodwill Ambassador. This day shall not be a legal holiday as defined in § 15-1-101.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.